

ELLSBERG, DANIEL

Apr. 7, 1931- Economist; political scientist; author

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A brilliant and articulate member of the "military-intellectual complex" that was responsible for American military policy in Southeast Asia, Dr. Daniel Ellsberg underwent a conversion from cold-blooded hawk to committed dove and released to the press portions of a top secret Pentagon study tracing the history of American involvement in the Vietnam war. The startling revelations of the Pentagon Papers, the historic court battles over freedom of the press, official secrecy, and national security, and the ultimate dismissal of all charges against Dr. Ellsberg helped to revive public interest in the constitutional powers of the executive branch of government. "The demystification and desanctification of the President has begun," a freed Ellsberg told newsmen on May 11, 1973, nearly two years after the Pentagon Papers were published in the New York Times. "It's like the defrocking of the Wizard of Oz."

The second of three children, Daniel Ellsberg was born to Mr. and Mrs. Harry Ellsberg on April 7, 1931 in Chicago, Illinois. His father, a structural engineer, had jobs that took him to southern Illinois and, in 1937, to Detroit where Daniel Ellsberg attended the Barber Elementary School. His mother, a musician determined to make her son a concert pianist, compelled the boy, from age five, to practice eight hours a day. Despite his lack of interest in the instrument, he continued to play the piano, occasionally performing concertos with amateur orchestras, even after his mother's death in an automobile accident when he was fifteen. In college, he stopped playing and, as he recalled in an interview with Joe McGinnis for a *Playboy* magazine article (October 1972), "found eight extra hours in the day. I feel like I've been on vacation ever since."

After graduating first in his class from Cranbrook, an exclusive suburban Detroit prep school that he had attended on scholarship, Ellsberg was given a four-year scholarship by Pepsi-Cola. An honor student of economics, political science, and decision theory at Harvard University, he edited the *Advocate*, the undergraduate literary magazine, and served on the editorial board of the *Harvard Crimson*. On taking his B.A. degree in economics, *summa cum laude*, in 1952, Ellsberg received a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to study advanced economics at Kings College, at Cambridge University. He returned to Harvard in 1953 for an M.A. degree in economics.

Waiving his student draft deferment, Ellsberg volunteered for two years duty in the United States Marine Corps in April 1954. Commissioned as a first lieutenant and eager for combat, he asked for an extended tour of duty when his battalion was sent to the Middle East during



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the Suez crisis in 1956. Although his unit saw no battle action, Ellsberg, according to Sanford J. Ungar in his *The Papers and the Papers* (1972), "developed an authentically military approach to America's international responsibilities." His military orientation became evident when he returned to Harvard, where as a member of the prestigious Society of Fellows, he worked on a Ph.D. in economics and submitted as his doctoral dissertation an analysis of strategic military planning called "Risk, Ambiguity and Decision." While at the university, Ellsberg anonymously advised Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy on military policy and served as a part-time consultant to the Rand Corporation, the West Coast "think tank."

Impressed by its expertise in systems analysis and long-range military planning, Ellsberg joined the Rand Corporation in June 1959 and began studying game theory and risk in nuclear warfare. "I would have worked for Rand for nothing," Ellsberg admitted to *Look* magazine's foreign editor J. Robert Moskin in an interview published in the October 5, 1971 issue. "It seemed the most important problem in the world." Often summoned to Washington, D.C. for high-level emergency meetings in the early 1960's, Ellsberg attended the behind-the-scenes discussions that determined official administration responses to the Cuban missile crisis and the alleged North Vietnamese attacks on United States vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin. In 1961 he visited Vietnam as part of a Defense Department task force on limited war.

Intrigued by the decision-making procedure involved in crisis situations, Ellsberg was eager to take part in actual policy decisions affecting Vietnam. Moving to Washington in August 1964, he joined the staff of John T. McNaughton, then assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. As one of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's "whiz kids," Ellsberg lobbied for the Johnson administration's war policies, wrote hawkish speeches, and, as he confessed to Barry Farrell in an interview for *Harper's* maga-

zine (October 1973), occasionally supplied the Secretary with "ten alternative lies" to explain difficult situations. Later, McNamara assigned Ellsberg the task of developing a series of rationalizations for an honorable United States withdrawal from Vietnam.

To evaluate the success of the civilian pacification program in South Vietnamese provinces, Ellsberg volunteered to assist Major General Edward G. Lansdale, a counter-insurgency expert, in July 1965. In a *New York Times* profile (June 27, 1971) Paul L. Montgomery described him as approaching his new post "with something like Boy Scout enthusiasm, glorying in combat and weapons." An ex-Marine sharpshooter, Ellsberg eagerly accompanied Army and Marine patrols on "clearing operations." "I saw it was all very hard on those people," Ellsberg remembered, as quoted by Mary McGrory in her syndicated column of July 17, 1971, "but I told myself that living under Communist control would be harder, and World War III, which I thought we were preventing, would be worse." Prompted by the failure of the American pacification program, the mounting toll of civilian deaths, widespread corruption in the Ky regime, reports of tortured Viet Cong prisoners, and contact with neutralist South Vietnamese politicians, an increasingly pessimistic Ellsberg became convinced that the war had "stalemated."

In the introduction to his *Papers on the War* (Simon & Schuster, 1972), he outlined the dismal prospect "of continued conflict, at increasing levels of violence, followed some day—probably later rather than sooner, and after more and more deaths, costs, destruction, and dissension at home—by U.S. withdrawal and NLF dominance." To publicize his views, Ellsberg delivered dozens of position papers to Secretary McNamara, whom he once cornered aboard a plane, and submitted memos and reports to Washington. After several months as the assistant to deputy Ambassador William J. Porter in Saigon, Ellsberg, recuperating from hepatitis, returned to the United States and to the Rand Corporation.

Late in 1967 Ellsberg was summoned to Washington at the request of Secretary McNamara to help compile a history of American-Vietnamese relations from 1945 through 1967. One of thirty-six researchers appointed to the project, Ellsberg selected the Kennedy commitments of 1961 as his area of concentration. Basing his assumptions on the popular "quagmire" model of the war, Ellsberg hypothesized that President Kennedy, reassured by optimistic field reports and confident military advisers, mistakenly followed the recommended course and stumbled into a morass of increased American involvement in a widening war in Indochina. His research, however, as he pointed out in an early working paper, revealed "the ultimate discrepancies between the Presidential policy . . . and the policies recommended by high-level advisers. . . . Over the next few years he considerably revised his opinion of Presidential responsibility for the policy of military escalation. "I think now to a large extent it was an American President's war," he told J. Robert Moskin.

"No American President, Republican or Democrat, wanted to be the President who lost the war or who lost Saigon."

After completing his portion of the study, which, like much of the forty-seven-volume history, was partly rewritten by a second analyst, Ellsberg returned to the Rand Corporation early in 1968 to work on a synthesis of Vietnam policy decisions for the Defense Department. At the same time he took part in the Pentagon meetings that led to a bombing halt in North Vietnam in November 1968, attended antiwar conferences, composed Senator Robert F. Kennedy's Vietnam policy statements for his Presidential primary campaign, and drafted a list of "A-to-Z" options, reportedly ranging from all-out nuclear war to the immediate unilateral withdrawal of all American troops from Indochina, for President-elect Richard M. Nixon's national security adviser Henry A. Kissinger. At the time Ellsberg believed that he could be most useful working from within the system to effect a change in policy toward Vietnam. "It's a trap I think others have fallen into," he told Joe McGinnis. "The closer you get to the military and the more you realize how truly evil the top levels can be, the more you feel it's an honorable job just keeping the monster on a short leash."

Taking advantage of his top-secret clearance, Ellsberg asked for certain volumes of the Pentagon study relevant to his research at Rand and transferred a total of eighteen volumes from Rand's Washington office to its California headquarters. After reading the history, Ellsberg concluded that the Vietnam war had been an "American war almost from its beginning." The Pentagon Papers denied the generally accepted theory of several successive Indochinese wars from 1945 to 1970 and the popular notion of a Vietnamese civil war. "In practical terms, it has been . . . a war of Vietnamese—not all of them but enough to persist—against American policy and American financing, proxies, technicians, firepower, and finally, troops and pilots," Ellsberg maintained in his introduction to *Papers on the War*. "To call a conflict in which one army is financed and equipped entirely by foreigners a 'civil war' simply screens a more painful reality: that the war is, after all, a foreign aggression. Our aggression."

Racked by guilt stemming from his complicity in Vietnam policy decisions and his role in the ill-conceived pacification program, Ellsberg took a drastic step. In the early autumn of 1969 he hired a copying machine and, assisted by Anthony J. Russo Jr., a Rand colleague he had met in Vietnam, reproduced the Pentagon study, with the hope that by making it public "truths that changed me could help Americans free themselves and other victims from our longest war."

Fully expecting to be sentenced to prison for his actions, Ellsberg delivered copies of the study to Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. When Fulbright cautiously declined to take immediate action, Ellsberg approached other government offi-

tials, including Henry A. Kissinger and Senator George S. McGovern. To coincide with the October 1969 antiwar demonstrations, Ellsberg, along with five other disaffected Rand employees, sent letters to the editors of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* urging immediate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. A few months later he resigned, under pressure, from Rand and accepted a post as a senior research associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for International Studies so that he could "speak to the public" about Vietnam. In the next few months, he participated in antiwar conferences, testified at trials of draft resisters and before Congressional committees, and wrote dozens of letters and articles expounding his views.

Frustrated by his failure to influence American policy and angered by the invasions of Cambodia and Laos, Ellsberg decided to leak the Pentagon Papers to the press. He contacted the *New York Times*'s highly respected Neil Sheehan, a former United Press International war correspondent he had known in Vietnam. Sheehan immediately accepted on behalf of the *Times*, and in March 1971 Ellsberg released the documents, withholding the four volumes that described the secret diplomatic attempts at a negotiated settlement.

The *New York Times* began publishing front-page articles based on the Pentagon Papers, including excerpts, in its Sunday edition of June 13, 1971. After three installments the government obtained an injunction preventing further publication of the *Times* series, but the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, and other newspapers, by obtaining portions of the Pentagon study through a well-orchestrated underground distribution system, continued to publish excerpts and analytical articles despite the threat of additional injunctions. The case, which hinged on the important First Amendment presumption against prior restraint, was decided in favor of the *Times* and the *Post* by the Supreme Court on June 30.

Identified as the source of the Pentagon Papers, Ellsberg surrendered to the United States Attorney in Boston on June 28. On the same day he was indicted in Los Angeles on two counts of converting government property to personal use and of illegally possessing government documents. Six months later the same grand jury handed down new indictments, adding twelve criminal charges, including conspiracy, theft, and violation of the Espionage Act, against Ellsberg and three against Russo. Ellsberg, who had publicly stated he was willing to "go to prison to help end this war," discussed the implications of his impending trial with Joe McGinnis: "If I am found guilty and the act of leaking thereby becomes a crime . . . , we'll have a censorship system that's airtight—a government press. Then we're in Saigon. The final step in the Vietnamization of America."

Because of a four-month series of unexpected procedural delays, Judge Matthew Byrne Jr. declared a mistrial on December 8, 1972 and ordered selection of a new jury. The second Pentagon Papers trial began on January 18, 1973 in

Los Angeles. Ellsberg, who had originally intended to use the courtroom as a forum for his views on Vietnam and official secrecy, was persuaded by his thirty-two member defense team to fight the case on legal rather than political grounds. Essentially the prosecuting attorney tried to portray Ellsberg and Russo as common thieves who had stolen government property vital to the national security. Ellsberg's lawyers countered that by pointing out that the defendants had authorized access to the study. Calling many former government officials, including McGeorge Bundy, Theodore Sorensen, and John Kenneth Galbraith, the defense contended that much of the information contained in the Pentagon Papers was in the public domain and therefore did not constitute a threat to national security.

As the case was about to go to the jury on May 11, 1973 Judge Byrne dismissed all charges against the defendants and precluded retrial, citing governmental misconduct, including illegal wiretapping, a break-in at the office of Ellsberg's former psychiatrist, and an offer by President Nixon of the directorship of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to himself. Charging that he and codefendant Russo had been victims of a "conspiracy to deprive us of our civil liberties," Ellsberg immediately announced his intention to bring suit against the government to recover the estimated \$900,000 spent in his defense.

Daniel Ellsberg is a tall, lean man with a narrow, sharp-featured face, piercing blue-gray eyes and graying dark hair. Writing in the *Guardian* (April 12, 1973), Peter Jenkins described Ellsberg as "a man driven by temperament and intellect to fierce and energetic commitment." Other observers have noted a "messianic, evangelistic" attitude and a "martyr drive." He is a "master of the monologue," wrote Barry Farrell in his *Harper's* magazine profile. "Contentious, pedantic, forever infatuated with the power of his intellect, he could educate but seldom entertain." Ellsberg does not smoke and drinks alcoholic beverages only rarely. To keep in shape, he swims and skis. His first marriage, to Carol Cummings, the daughter of a retired Marine Corps Brigadier General, ended in divorce in the early 1960's. He and his second wife, the former Patricia Marx, a toy company heiress and longtime antiwar activist whom he married on August 8, 1970, maintain apartments in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Ellsberg has two teen-aged children, Robert and Mary, from his first marriage.

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